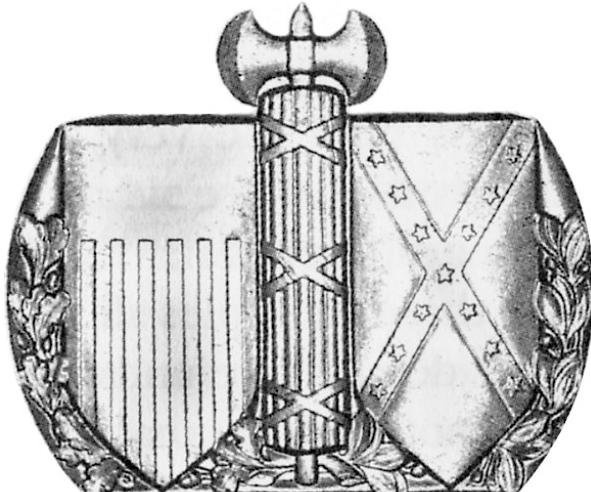


IN GOD WE TRUST



THE STORY OF A NATIONAL MOTTO

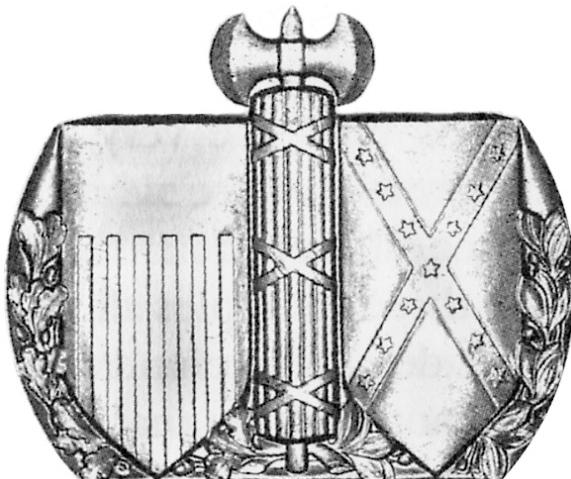
By
Roger W. Burdette

ISBN: 1234567890

Seneca Mill Press
P.O. Box 1423, Great Falls, VA 22066

© Copyright 2008 by Roger W. Burdette. All rights reserved. No portion of the text or images contained in this publication, excepting short portions for critical review, may be reproduced in any form except with the written permission of the copyright holder. Certain images printed herein are the property of their respective owners and are used by permission.

IN GOD WE TRUST



THE STORY OF A NATIONAL MOTTO
By
Roger W. Burdette

Excerpted from the book
Renaissance of American Coinage, 1905-1908, by Roger W. Burdette

America is a nation built on faith in God. At its essence is the belief in this ultimate, eternal presence, and in the fundamental right of each citizen to express this faith in concert with their personal religious convictions.

Each generation of Americans has had to master a new and potentially threatening world. Through peace and war, prosperity and financial trial, we have held this ideal of faith to our hearts, gaining comfort and strength from its truth.

The greatest peril to America occurred during the Civil War (also called the “War Between the States”) when the Southern states seceded, and the Federal government sought to prevent their action. Families and communities were split between loyalty to the nation and to their home state. Issues of trade, slavery and the meaning of sovereignty filled newspapers, speeches and church sermons.

As in other times of great stress, Americans in both Union and Confederate states turned to their faith in God for comfort and guidance. From this great outpouring of religion and hope came the simple, heartfelt letter from a Baptist pastor that inspired the motto “In God We Trust.”

“Recognition of the Almighty”

In November 1861, the Civil War had been underway for over six months. What many Northerners thought would be a quick and easy end to the Southern insurrection, was being replaced with recognition that a long and violent conflict was ahead. Some may have realized that for the South to win, they simply had to keep the northern armies engaged until popular sentiment turned in their favor (or the British interceded). The North had to be much more aggressive if it was to be victorious – they had to defeat Southern armies, particularly the Army of Northern Virginia under General Robert E. Lee, and occupy key Southern cities and transportation centers including the Portsmouth-Norfolk, Virginia area.

Anxiety was manifest in a rapid increase of patriotic and religious fervor among the population of both sides. Ministers called on God to smite their enemies and bring victory to their own just cause. Rhetoric of real and imagined injustices mixed with volatile brimstone on any given Sunday. Out of this caldron of faith came a letter from Rev. Mark R. Watkinson, pastor of the First Particular Baptist Church in Ridley, Pennsylvania.¹ He wrote to Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase with a patriotic suggestion for the nation’s coinage. In his letter dated November 13, 1861, Rev. Watkinson said:²

Hon. S. P. Chase
U.S. Sec of Treasury

Dear Sir:

You are about to submit your annual report to Congress respecting the affairs of the National Finances.

One fact touching our Currency has hitherto been seriously overlooked: I mean the recognition of the Almighty God in some form in our coins.

You are probably a Christian. What if our Republic were now shattered beyond reconstruction? Would not the antiquaries of succeeding centuries rightly reason from our past that we were a heathen nation?

What I propose is that instead of the goddess of Liberty we shall have next inside the thirteen stars a ring inscribed with the words "Perpetual Union"; within this ring the all-seeing eye crowned with a halo. Beneath this eye the American flag, bearing in its field stars equal to the number of the States United; in the folds of the bars the words "God, liberty, law."

This would make a beautiful coin, to which no possible citizen could object. This would relieve us from the ignominy of heathenism. This would place us openly under the Divine protection we have personally claimed. From my heart I have felt our National shame in disowning God as not the least of our present national disasters.

To you first I address a subject that must be agitated.

M. R. Watkinson,
Minister of the Gospel

Rev. Watkinson's suggestion was for a special coin design promoting the Union cause. It incorporated thirteen stars, an "all seeing eye" of Divine providence, an American flag with a star for each state, and two new legends: "Perpetual Union" and "God, liberty, law." (Fifty-five years later, sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens wanted to add the words "Justice" or "Law" to the double eagle gold coin, but was dissuaded by specifications of the coinage laws.)

Although Watkinson had suggested a new coin design and inscriptions, Secretary Chase concentrated on the concept of recognizing God on America's coinage. On November 21, he wrote to Mint Director James K. Pollock:³

...No nation can be strong except in the strength of God, or safe except in His defense. The trust of our people in God should be declared on our national coins. You will cause a device to be prepared without unnecessary delay with a motto expressing in the fewest and tersest terms possible, this national recognition.

The Mint's engraver, James B. Longacre, was given the task of making pattern coins with the new motto. He quickly modified two existing coin dies , and on Decem-

ber 26, 1861, the Mint Director responded with news that must have pleased Chase:⁴

...I have caused this motto [God Our Trust] to be struck on reverse dies of the eagle and half dollar, and impressions in copper of the eagle, and in silver of the half dollar are presented herewith.



Figure 1. Examples of pattern coins with "God Our Trust" added to the reverse die. Left, half dollar showing text on a raised ribbon; right, ten dollar (or eagle) showing text as raised letters on a plain field. The U.S. Mint created these in December 1861 to illustrate the possible use of the motto on circulating coins.

It seems odd that one short letter could change the inscription on America's coinage, yet there is no record of other letters making similar suggestions. The unusual impact Rev. Watkinson's letter had can be better understood if we examine the young Baptist minister's career in more detail.

Reverend Watkinson

Mark Richards Watkinson was born on a farm near Burlington, New Jersey on October 24, 1824. His parents, Abel and Deborah Watkinson, had a large family to support and after Mark completed elementary school he was apprenticed to the *Mt. Holly Herald (NJ)* newspaper and commercial printer. At age 15 he joined the Mt. Holly Baptist Church later moving to Philadelphia in 1845 as a journeyman printer. He joined the Broad Street Baptist Church the same year and came under the influence of Rev. J. Lansing Burrows, who encouraged Watkinson to use his talents in the ministry. With assistance from the church congregation, he attended The University at Lewisburg⁵ for eighteen

months, then entered Columbia College in Washington, DC.⁶

After serving for a short time as “evangelist” for the Baptist Church of Bristol, Pennsylvania, he moved to Ridley and joined the First Particular Baptist Church of Ridley Township on October 16, 1850. A year later he was ordained as a minister and the congregation agreed to pay him the sum of \$400 per year as salary. As was common at the time, the young minister saw less hard money than he did vegetables, potatoes and the occasional chicken in payment for his services. He met his future wife, Sarah Isabella Griffiths, during a baptism ceremony at the church, and the young couple stayed in Ridley until 1853. Later that year the family moved to Philadelphia where he was minister at the Schuylkill Baptist Church until 1856. At 32, Mark Watkinson was an attractive young man, an excellent sermon writer and attentive to the members of his congregation. His talents for people made him a respected, well liked, and trusted member of the community.

A Church in Portsmouth

By 1856, the Portsmouth-Norfolk area of Virginia was slowly recovering from the yellow fever epidemic of the previous summer. During the epidemic approximately 18,000 people left the area out of a population of 27,000. Of those that remained nearly 3,000 died until cold weather stopped the mosquito-borne disease.⁷ Court Street Baptist Church in Portsmouth, one of the oldest Baptist congregations in Virginia, was trying to regain members and turn around its reputation for poor [financial] treatment of its ministers.

Rev. Watkinson learned of the Portsmouth situation and applied to Court Street Baptist for the pastor’s position. With help from church member and distinguished former pastor, Rev. Thomas Hume, Sr., the congregation examined Watkinson’s credentials and unanimously elected him pastor on July 22, 1856.⁸ They also agreed to a salary of \$1,000 for his first year – a generous

sum for the time. Watkinson used his eloquence and personal charm to bring together and enlarge the congregation. New members joined nearly every Sunday and his church prospered over the next five years.

Relations between the slave and free states had been uneasy from the beginning of the Constitutional era. Secession of the New England states⁹ had been narrowly averted in 1814, and the 1850s saw continual bickering and compromise to keep the country together. The Portsmouth-Norfolk area was home to one of the largest military ports on the East Coast including the Gosport Navy Yard. Residents were torn between close ties with northern businesses and loyalty to their home state of Virginia. As tensions rose after the election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860, pressure mounted on the populace to choose sides. Newspapers and pulpits rang with rhetoric of states-rights and national duty. Watkinson's church, as would be expected from a large congregation, was in the thick of controversy and confusion.

On November 25, 1860, in a sermon from his pulpit,¹⁰ Rev. Watkinson let his people know where he stood. He declared himself forthrightly in favor of the course of the South, and in opposition to the views of abolitionists.

The sermon created a sensation; many people were overjoyed and called for a church conference that evening to request a copy of the sermon, and ask that it be published. Other members, who sided with the Union, were critical of a sermon they considered inflammatory, or even seditious. Rev. Watkinson seemed pleased with the result of his speech and "cheerfully and promptly" consented to publication of the sermon. Copies were soon delivered to the *Daily Transcript* and other newspapers agreeing with its sentiment, and to the Baptist church's publication *Religious Herald*. (The sermon was never actually published.)

By spring, 1861 several Southern states had seceded from the Union. When the Virginia Legislature passed a secession bill in April 1861, rioting and violence threatened Portsmouth. The United States flag was torn

down on April 20, 1861. Ships were burnt in the Gosport Navy Yard¹¹ in nearby Norfolk – the region seemed in open rebellion. Apparently, some of the violence was directed at Rev. Watkinson and his family due to his position in the community. His family was in danger and he quickly sent his wife and children northward by steamer.

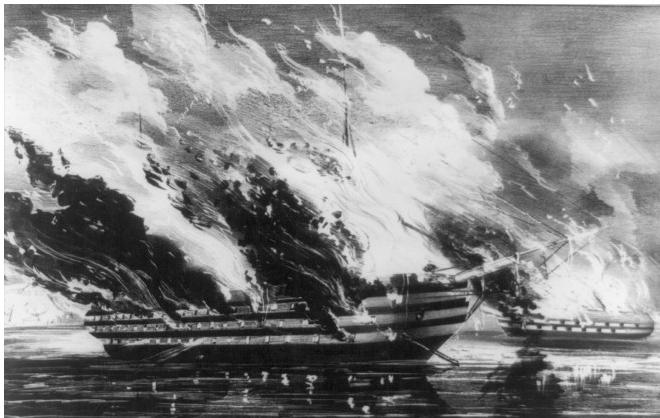


Figure 2. Burning of the U.S. ship of the line Pennsylvania, and other vessels, at the Gosport Navy Yard, Norfolk, Va. on the night of April 20th 1861. By Currier & Ives. (Courtesy Prints and Photographic Division, Library of Congress)

As the last ship was about to leave for the North on April 23, 1861, he stepped aboard leaving behind his church and congregation. There were many harsh words about his disloyalty to Virginia, and the inconsistency of his sermon versus his act of abandoning Portsmouth. The next Sunday afternoon 19-year old Annie M. Cox wrote in her diary:¹²

1861 - APRIL 28TH Sabbath afternoon. I did not go to church this morning as it commenced raining just about church time. Pa went down but there was no preaching. Alas! We are now left without a pastor. Mr. Watkinson has taken his departure, gone north & sent a letter of resignation to the church. I think it would have been much more manly & better for him if he had resigned before he left. I am very sorry that he has acted thus & that is after preaching and talking so much against abolitionists to go right among them. But we cannot judge him. God alone knoweth the heart.

Others may have understood his desire to protect his family, and openly defended him. Most admitted that the church and the Portsmouth citizenry had suffered the greater loss when Watkinson left.

Union Refuge

Turmoil in Portsmouth must have had a profound impact on the 37 year-old minister. His family had been threatened, riots had broken out, the symbol of his country desecrated, and it may have felt as if the Almighty had abandoned the country. Watkinson and his family took refuge in Ridley, the small Pennsylvania community where he had first become a minister, and his wife's hometown. From this safe place he wrote again to the Portsmouth church on May 10, formally resigning his position. The congregation responded by expelling him for misconduct in leaving his church. In Ridley people welcomed back their former pastor and gave him the position of "supply minister" at \$5 per week pay.¹³

By July, he was in the vicinity of the Battle of Manassas, Virginia, (a.k.a. "First Bull Run") near the 27th Pennsylvania Volunteers, performing religious duties for the troops.¹⁴ Within a few months, Rev. Watkinson, troubled by the Civil War, wrote his heartfelt letter to Secretary Chase.

In leaving Portsmouth, Watkinson acted for the safety of his family, but he was not alone in his concern. Those who remained in the area were still divided in their loyalties, although the majority supported the Southern cause. His many friends and acquaintances remained, and Watkinson evidently maintained contact with them through the early months of the war.

Letter to President Lincoln

After Union forces captured Norfolk¹⁵ on May 10, 1862, Watkinson appears to have begun active lobbying to return to Court Street Baptist Church.

He traveled to the area on August 9, 1863 probably to meet with local church members and discuss his possible return as minister. Concluding a two-week stay, Rev. Watkinson wrote a detailed letter to President Lincoln:¹⁶

Hon. A. Lincoln
President of the United States

Having just returned from a fortnight's visit to Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia;¹⁷ in the possession of valuable news of the Rebel plans derived from men I know to be trustworthy from a protracted acquaintance, allow me to give you in detail what I have learned. Most of this information I gave to a Naval Captain before leaving Portsmouth upon the promise that it should reach you. If that Officer's report has come this will corroborate it.

First. As to Rebel resources.

Gen. Lee is trying to secure 150,000 men. His retreat from Pennsylvania left him about 60,000 reliable troops. They are near him in Culpepper, or were week before last. He has little or no force at Richmond, or Petersburg.--

That he is put to close quarters for men is known from letters to families in Portsmouth stating that the "signal corps" would perhaps have to be abolished and the men go into the ranks, -- their cavalry performing the duties of the "signal corps." I have several most intimate friends of yore in that signal corps.

Of materiel. There is abundance, no lack of food, clothing, etc--

Second. Their plans.

All machinery, manufacturing, Stores, etc., are removed to Fayetteville, and Charlotte, two towns in Southern North Carolina, as you will see by reference to the map. Their purpose is to retire gradually from the sea-board, burning everything behind them. They are carrying their slaves thitherward also.

To corroborate this, let me say, all the workmen from Norfolk and Portsmouth are now at those towns at work. They formerly were in Richmond, Virginia, mainly.

Third. Of Union feeling in North Carolina.

My information on that subject is that it is all "bosh". Only a few in the tide-water regions think yet of a return to the Federal Government,

Fourth. Of approaches to Richmond, Virginia.

By the James River not at all now-- For, that stream is filled with well-made torpedoes from City Point to Richmond. Then for eight (8) miles adjoining the river, below Richmond, are high hills that are regularly excavated, and case mated, with iron facings around the case mates at an angle of forty-five degrees.

Just now if Gen. Meade can hold Gen. Lee engaged in Culpeper, Gen. Hooker with some 20,000 or 30,000 men, by a *coup de main* from the head of York River might slip in and hold it; or else regular siege approaches from that point must be resorted to.

Fifth. Of war vessels.

Merrimac No. 2 is all ready for a raid to Norfolk and its surroundings, if the James River be not well guarded. This vessel draws only eight (8) feet of water was built at Gosport Navy Yard, and with many other vessels ran the blockade to Richmond the night before Norfolk was evacuated. She is more formidable than Merrimac No. 1 [a.k.a.: *Virginia*], except in speed, She can make but 3 miles an hour, These vessels carried a vast quantity of materiel away from the Navy Yard at that time.

Wilmington N. C.

I hope Gen. Foster¹⁸ has taken, though well defended. The Alabama River is a depot for iron clads also.

It is believed in Norfolk that a vigorous fall campaign in Virginia leading to Gen. Lee's abandonment of it wholly, or in part, would lead to the reconstruction of the Old State Government, although the secessionists are thoroughly bitter at the Northern people. President Davis may be a prisoner indeed in Richmond from the facts I have here given you, and because I took pains to spread it South that he had funds invested in Paris for his private behoof; and that I believed he would run the blockade thither; and might do it in six months. If I go to Portsmouth to preach for the Union men, who have desired me so to do, I may have occasion to send you letters from that point. If so, I shall sign them No. 1, 2, 3, 4, &c--¹⁹

One other fact, and I close.

You have heard a rumor of a difference of opinion between Gen. Lee and President Davis respecting the execution of Captains Sawyer and Flynn.²⁰ The exact truth is that two weeks ago, in Culpepper, Gen. Lee made a speech to his army in which he said, "Gentlemen, you may have heard it rumored that there was a difference [of] opinion between President Davis and myself. It is not true. We are a unit in all purposes and plans. Captains Sawyer and Flynn will be executed. I anticipate my son and Gen. Winder will be executed in retaliation.²¹ But if they are, gentlemen, I never take another prisoner."

Thus the case stands.-- Our troops ought to be three to their one so malignantly will they fight.

Yours truly,
M. R. Watkinson
Ridley, P.A. August 25, 1863

The letter suggests a keen observer with numerous reliable contacts, and may represent only a small part of the information available to him on just one short trip to Norfolk and Portsmouth. The general tone and familiarity of this letter hint not only a commonality of cause, but previous contact between the Lincoln Administration and Watkinson. He writes with full conviction in his cause, and expectation that his words will be read and appreciated.

According to Court Street Baptist Church records, “An effort was made to recall [Watkinson] as Court Street Baptist pastor while federal troops held our city in September, in 1863, while Brother Dobbs was pastor, but the vote was only three for him and sixty-seven against him.” The sentence in Watkinson’s letter to Lincoln: “If I go to Portsmouth to preach for the Union men, who have desired me so to do, I may have occasion to send you letters from that point,” when read in concert with the church record, is a clear indication that Watkinson hoped to get the church appointment, and if successful, would be collecting military intelligence for the Union.²²



Figure 3. Rev. Mark R. Watkinson (cr. 1863). (Courtesy Prospect Hill Baptist Church.)

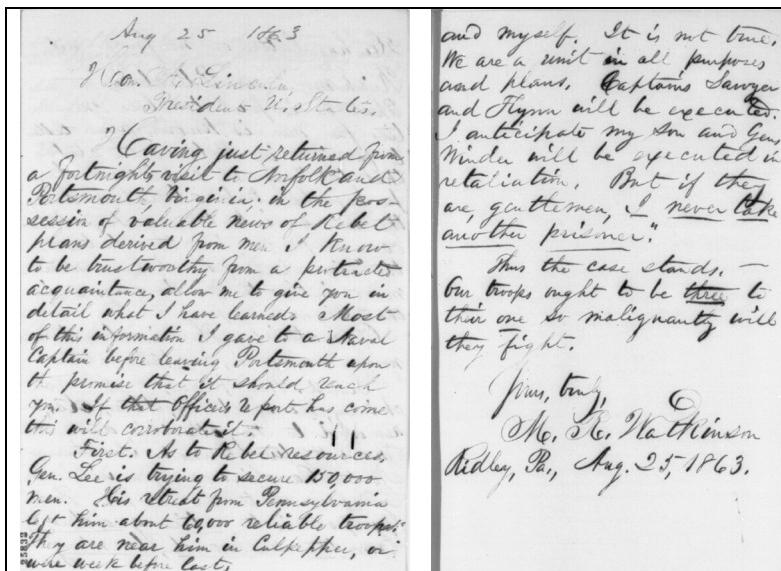


Figure 4. First and last pages of Rev. Watkinson's letter to President Lincoln, August 25, 1863. (Courtesy Library of Congress)

The man who signed himself simply “Minister of the Gospel” was able to travel freely to Norfolk, Portsmouth, and possibly beyond to Richmond – the political and military heart of the Confederacy. He was trusted locally, and well connected in important parts of Southern society. In this capacity, he kept his eyes and ears open for information that might help the Union cause. In effect, Watkinson was a part-time Union spy who may have been better known to Secretary Chase and possibly President Lincoln than previously thought.²³

The Motto Appears – At Last

Through 1861, 1862, and 1863, many pattern coins were prepared utilizing current designs, and completely new compositions. Multiple permutations of the “God Our Trust” motto were tried and examined. On December 8, 1863, designs were submitted to the Secretary of the Treasury along with a letter of explanation from Director Pollock.²⁴

I also propose for your consideration the coinage of a two-cent piece, same material and double weight of the cent, and with such devices and motto as may be approved by you. This piece would be a great public convenience, and its coinage, in my opinion, should be authorized. The devices are beautiful and appropriate, and the motto on each such, as all who fear God and love their country, will approve. I prefer the "shield and arrows" to the "head of Washington" on the obverse of the coin. They are submitted for your consideration. If you approve the change of material, and the coinage of the two-cent piece, or whether, I will, if you direct it, prepare a supplement to the existing laws, to be by you submitted to Congress for their action.

Secretary Chase replied the next day, noting:²⁵

I approve of your mottoes, only suggesting that on that with the Washington obverse the motto should begin with the word, "Our," so as to read, "Our God And Our Country." And on that with the shield it should be changed so as to read, "In God We Trust."



Figure 5. Sample mottoes on pattern two cent coins, 1863. The composition incorporating the shield was adopted in 1864 for the new denomination.

With patriotism running high, there was considerable interest in both Union and Confederate areas in George Washington. Citizens collected many varieties of tokens, advertising cards and other ephemera, some of which featured Washington's portrait. The Mint's patterns featuring a bust of Washington may have intended to connect with this sentiment. However, there was ample precedent

against using Washington's portrait on a coin, including his own objections.



Figure 6. Two-cent bronze coin of 1864. This was the first circulating U.S. coin to include the motto "In God We Trust."

Therefore, the shield design with “In God We Trust” engraved on a ribbon over the shield, was the version of the motto selected by Director Pollock for use on a new circulating coin. On April 22, 1864, Congress approved an amendment to the Coinage Act of 1857²⁶ that read in part:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That, from and after the passage of this act, the standard weight of the cent coined at the mint of the United States shall be forty-eight grains, or one tenth of one ounce troy; and said cent shall be composed of ninety-five per centum of tin and zinc, in such proportions as shall be determined by the director of the mint; and there shall be from time to time struck and coined at the mint a two-cent piece of the same composition, the standard weight of which shall be ninety-six grains, or one fifth of one ounce troy, with no greater deviation than four grains to each piece of said cent and two-cent coins; and the shape, mottoes, and devices of said coins shall be fixed by the director of the mint, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury; and the laws now in force relating to the coinage of cents and providing for the purchase of material and prescribing the appropriate duties of the officers of the mint and the Secretary of the Treasury be, and the same are hereby, extended to the coinage provided for.

The legislation thus approved the small bronze cent, the new two cent coin and authorized the Director of the Mint, with approval from the Secretary of the Treasury, to place whatever mottoes he felt appropriate on the two coins. Notice that the law did not extend to other denominations, and did not specify the mottoes to be used.

The new 1864 two cent pieces were the first to display the motto "In God We Trust" on a circulating coin when nearly 20 million were produced. Legislation to enable more extensive use of the motto was approved in a bill, *An Act to authorize the Coinage of Three-Cent pieces, and for other Purposes*, passed by Congress on March 3, 1865. Section Five of the Act stated:

...And be it further enacted, That, in addition to the devices and legends upon the gold, silver, and other coins of the United States, it shall be lawful for the director of the mint, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury, to cause the motto "In God We Trust" to be placed upon such coins hereafter to be issued as shall admit of such legend thereon.

In authorizing specific text for the motto, Congress followed accepted practice and used the wording on the two-cent coin. The Director and Secretary now had authority to place the specific motto on any of the coins, provided there was sufficient room for the wording. The law did not require use of the motto, but the Mint was quick to apply it to as many denominations as possible.

"In God We Trust" appeared on the 2¢ from 1864 –1873, and 5¢ nickel coins from 1866-1883, but was omitted from both Liberty and Indian nickel designs from 1883 to 1938. On silver, the motto appeared only on the quarter, half-dollar and dollar. The gold \$5, \$10, and \$20 coins included the motto until 1908 when it was also added to the quarter eagle. It was omitted from the eagle and double eagle of Saint-Gaudens' design dated 1907, and part of the 1908 double eagles issued before May 19, 1908. It was added to the new Lincoln cent in 1909, to the Winged Liberty dime in 1916, and reintroduced on the 5¢ nickel in 1938 along with Thomas Jefferson's portrait.

Rev. Mark Watkinson remained in Ridley until 1864. He then went to Second Baptist Church in Camden, New Jersey (1864-1871). On August 11, 1867, with the Civil War over and reconstruction underway, Watkinson was again elected pastor of Court Street Baptist Church. This time, he declined the invitation. His last church was High Street Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland (1871-1873). He remained in Baltimore, his health rapidly declining, until his death on September 26, 1877. He was buried in the cemetery of the First Baptist Church of Pemberton, New Jersey.

The Motto in the 20th Century

The new motto was carried without alteration on most denominations of United States coins until early in the 20th Century. That changed with the dynamic administration of President Theodore Roosevelt. Young, vigorous, a student of everything, the consummate American nationalist, Roosevelt decided "...our coinage is artistically of atrocious hideousness."²⁷ This determined, the President engaged America's best sculptor, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, to redesign the nation's coins. Circumstances permitted the artist to design only



Figure 7. 1907 \$20 and \$10 gold coin designs by Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Note absence of motto.

the \$20 gold (double eagle) and the \$10 gold (eagle) coins before his death in 1907. The new designs were far superior to the old ones and were enthusiastically accepted by Roosevelt. One of the peculiarities of the two coins was omission of the motto "In God We Trust" which had previously appeared on these denominations.

President Roosevelt personally objected to the word "God" appearing on coins as he explained in a letter written on November 11, 1907.²⁸

When the question of the new coinage came up we lookt into the law and found there was no warrant therein for putting "In God We Trust" on the coins. As the custom, altho without legal warrant, had grown up, however, I might have felt at liberty to keep the inscription had I approved of its being on the coinage. But as I did not approve of it, I did not direct that it should again be put on. Of course the matter of the law is absolutely in the hands of Congress, and any direction of Congress in the matter will be immediately obeyed. At present, as I have said, there is no warrant in law for the inscription.

My own feeling in the matter is due to my very firm conviction that to put such a motto on coins, or to use it in any kindred manner, not only does no good but does positive harm, and is in effect irreverence which come dangerously close to sacrilege. A beautiful and solemn sentence such as the one in question should be treated and uttered only with that fine reverence which necessarily implies a certain exaltation of spirit. Any use which tends to cheapen is, and, above all, any use which tends to secure its being treated in a spirit of levity, is from every standpoint profoundly regretted. It is a motto which it is indeed well to have inscribed on our great national monuments, in our temples of justice, in our legislative halls, and in buildings such as those at West Point and Annapolis – in short, wherever it will tend to arouse and inspire a lofty emotion in those who look thereon. But it seems to me eminently unwise to cheapen such a motto by use on coins, just as it would be to cheapen it by use on postage stamps, or in advertisements. As regards its use on the coinage we have actual experience by which to go. In all my life I have never heard any human being speak reverently of this mot-

to on the coins or show any sign of its having appealed to any high emotion in him. But I have literally hundreds of times heard it used as an occasion of, and incitement to, the sneering ridicule which it is above all things undesirable that so beautiful and exalted a phrase should excite. For example, thruout the long contest, extending over several decades, on the free coinage question, the existence of this motto on the coins was a constant source of jest and ridicule; and this was unavoidable. Everyone must remember the innumerable cartoons and articles based on phrases like "In God we trust for the other eight cents"; "In God we trust for the short weight"; "In God we trust for the thirty-seven cents we do not pay"; and so forth and so forth. Surely I am well within bounds when I say that a use of the phrase which invites constant levity of this type is most undesirable. If Congress alters the law and directs me to replace on the coins the sentence in question the direction will be immediately put into effect; but I very earnestly trust that the religious sentiment of the country, the spirit of reverence in the country, will prevent any such action being taken.

The President was correct: the law did not require the motto on coins. His personal feeling was based on deep, sincere religious faith. However, the Congress and many religious groups disagreed, believing the motto was now "tradition." A brief postcard from W. A. Brearley to the U.S. Mint may be typical of the ones received by the Treasury and White House:²⁹

The one who is responsible for omitting the motto from the new coins will have to hunt for a new job, or I am much mistaken.

By May 1908 a law had been passed requiring the motto on all coins which had previously carried it. Only the Saint-Gaudens' design double eagle and eagle of 1907, and some of the 1908 double eagles lack the motto.

Use of "In God We Trust" on coins was now well established, but it was not until the late 1950s that it appeared on United States paper money. Matthew H. Rothert of Camden, Arkansas, made the suggestion in Novem-

ber 1953 to Secretary of the Treasury, George W. Humphrey. With support from Senator William Fullbright, Congress approved use of the motto on paper currency in 1955 and the motto finally appeared in 1957 when new master plates were engraved.

Epilog

It is unlikely that anyone in the Treasury Department or Mint recognized Mark Watkinson's impact on American history. Considering the long delay between his 1861 suggestion and release of the 2-cent coins in 1864, it is doubtful that even Rev. Watkinson connected the new motto with his letter to Secretary Chase.

Much of the credit for discovering the origin of the motto and the influence of Rev. Watkinson goes to Samuel H. Newsome of Middletown, PA, who was president of the Delaware County Historical Society; Harmed B. Cole, from Pennsville, NJ a member of the Delaware County Coin Club; and, William C. Boston from Ridley Park, PA who was a local numismatist. The three collected church and community records from the Delaware County Pennsylvania area, coordinated the evidence and presented their findings to the public in the early 1960s.³⁰ Others who assisted with the project were Elsie M. Jones, Mrs. William J. Moffett, John W. Brown, and Mrs. Harry Bond who was the last remaining direct descendant of Mark and Sarah Watkinson. In 1962 the Delaware County Coin Club in recognition of Rev. Watkinson presented a large commemorative plaque to the Prospect Hill Baptist Church.

The present author has confirmed much of the earlier material and added information from Court Street Baptist Church in Portsmouth, VA, the Baptist Historical Society, the Baptist Encyclopedia of 1881 and 1883, the Library of Congress, Harvard University, and many other sources. Until the present research, Rev. Watkinson's letter to President Lincoln was unknown to numismatists.

Special appreciation goes to Mr. William Smith of Portsmouth, Virginia who generously provided copies of Court Street Baptist Church histories, and located important documents owned by Portsmouth families.

End Notes

¹ This church was renamed Prospect Hill Baptist Church on June 2, 1887, and incorporated April 3, 1888. A new building was constructed at 7th & Lincoln Avenues, Prospect Park, Pennsylvania. A commemorative plaque is affixed to the building.

² Report of the Committee on Coinage, Weights, and Measures accompanying House Resolution 17296, *To Restore The Motto 'In God We Trust' to The Coins of The United States*, as reported out of committee on February 27, 1908. Original document in National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

³ Andrew Pollock, *United States Patterns and Related Issues*. Bowers & Ruddy Galleries, Wolfeboro, NH. p101.

⁴ *Ibid.* Chase had resigned from the Cabinet on December 20, but rescinded his resignation on December 22.

⁵ This was a Baptist Church-sponsored college which later became non-sectarian and renamed *Bucknell University*.

⁶ This was also a Baptist Church-sponsored college which later became non-sectarian and renamed *George Washington University*.

⁷ Isaac W. K. Handy, *The Terrible Doings of God*. Sermon delivered in the Court Street Baptist Church, December 30, 1855. Daily Transcript Office. 1856. 24 pages. Handy was a Presbyterian minister and later a Union prisoner at Fort Delaware. See also George D. Armstrong, DD, *The Summer of the Pestilence: A History of the Ravages of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk, Virginia, A. D. 1855*; Reprint by C. W. Tazewell, 1964.

⁸ Thomas Hume, Sr. (1812-1875) was one of the most distinguished Baptist ministers in Virginia during the first half of the 19th Century. He was often called upon to give the inaugural sermon when a new church building was dedicated, or to provide advise on forming new congregations. Rev Hume served at Court Street Baptist from 1834 to 1854. His personal papers (and those of his son) are held by the University of North Carolina.

⁹ The New England secession movement gained momentum for an entire decade, but ultimately failed at the Hartford Secession Convention of 1814.

¹⁰ Sources say November 27, however that date was a Tuesday – not a likely day for sermons.

¹¹ The Gosport Navy Yard is physically located in Portsmouth, however long-standing convention identifies it with Norfolk.

¹² *Annie Matson Cox personal diary*. Courtesy private collection of direct descendant, Mrs. Ann Benson Green; member Court Street Baptist Church. Quoted with permission.

¹³ A “supply minister” was usually a seminary student supplied to a congregation on a temporary basis to substitute for a pastor during illness or prolonged absence. In Watkinson’s case, this was a way for the congregation to provide employment for their former pastor without dismissing the current pastor.

¹⁴ The 27th Pennsylvania Volunteers were held at Centerville, Fairfax County, Virginia and did not enter into the main battle. They were caught up in the disorganized retreat (“panicked flight”) of Union troops and civilians back to Washington.

¹⁵ The capture of Norfolk is one of the most interesting small battles of the Civil War and the only one in which President Lincoln, along with Secretary of the Treasury Chase, gave direct orders for military action.

¹⁶ *Abraham Lincoln Papers*. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.: American Memory Project, 2000-03. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/alhome.html>, accessed February 2, 2003. Transcribed and annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois. Letter dated August 25, 1863 to Abraham Lincoln from Mark R. Watkinson

¹⁷ This may have been during Watkinson’s attempt to regain the minister’s position at Court Street Baptist Church in Portsmouth, VA.

¹⁸ Maj. Gen. John G. Foster, commanding the Department of Virginia and North Carolina.

¹⁹ Watkinson was rejected for the minister’s post at Court Street Baptist Church on September 25, 1863, and may not have had further opportunity to collect information.

²⁰Captains W. H. Sawyer and John M. Flinn had been selected by lot from among the officers confined at Libby Prison, and were sentenced to die in retaliation for the execution of Captains T. G. McGraw and William F. Corbin who were executed by Union authorities for spying in Kentucky.

²¹ Lee's son, Brig. Gen. W. H. F. "Rooney" Lee, had been captured in a Federal raid on June 26, 1863 while recuperating at his wife's family home from wounds received at Brandy Station. While being held at the hospital at Ft. Monroe, he was allowed some liberty of movement on his promise not to escape. On July 15, however, he was ordered held in close confinement and threatened with execution should the Confederacy put Sawyer and Flinn to death. General Lee did not personally intervene in his son's behalf, but the Union threat worked and Sawyer and Flinn were not killed. Rooney Lee was held until March 1864. It had been mistakenly reported that a "Capt. Winder" was held hostage along with W. H. F. Lee. The second officer, in actuality, was Capt. R. H. Tyler of the 8th Virginia Infantry.

²² Watkinson preached at the Court Street Baptist prior to August 23 during his 1863 visit. (Diary of *Annie M. Cox* August 23, 1863, also see note 12, above.) After the war ended, he was offered the position again on August 11, 1867, but declined.

²³ Sources: histories of Prospect Hill Baptist Church, Ridley, PA; Court Street Baptist Church, 447 Court Street, Portsmouth, VA; First Baptist Church of Richmond, Twelfth and Broad Streets, Richmond, VA. Delaware County Historical Society, Broomall, PA. No documents are known which connect Watkinson and Lincoln prior to 1863. There also is no extant correspondence with the War Department or Secretary Chase except for the November 1863 letter.

²⁴ *National Archives and Records Administration*. Record Group 104, U. S. Mint; correspondence.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ The formal title is: *An Act in Amendment of an Act entitled, "An Act Relating to Foreign Coins and the Coinage of Cents at the Mint of the United States," approved February twenty-one, eighteen hundred and fifty-seven.*

²⁷ *Roosevelt Letters*, Harvard University Press. Volume 4, p1088. Letter dated December 27, 1904 to Leslie M. Shaw, Secretary of the Treasury.

²⁸ *Theodore Roosevelt papers*. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division. Microfilm reel 347, p200-223; multiple identical letters sent to correspondents regarding the motto. Also, one letter reproduced in Harvard University collection.

²⁹ National Archives and Records Administration. Record Group 104, U. S. Mint; postcard dated November 7, 1907.

³⁰ Arden Skidmore, *County Minister Fought for Motto*. [Delaware County] Daily Times, December 26, 1964. p4A-5A.

Numismatic photographs from the author's collection.